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## Project Home and provocative Fluff

### Visions of home in St. Pete; a horrific farewell in Tampa

BY MEGAN VOELLER  
Published 04.04.07

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Williams Park, with its welcoming benches and leafy trees, seems an unlikely zone of contention. But as St. Petersburgians know, the downtown park is ground zero in a mostly civil struggle between the city and the homeless people who like to call it home.

Leave it to artists to try and find a way to bring the two sides together.

Last weekend, nearly two dozen of them constructed creative interpretations of "home" in the park, for the most part diplomatically skirting the issue of homelessness as a social problem. They hoped to create a thought-provoking but ideology-free zone where folks who have conventional homes and folks who don't could come together.

Yoko Nogami, a local teacher and Tokyo native who is a vagabond of sorts, organized the project with help from six other artists -- Allen Loyd, Michael Chomick, Michael Conway, Tom Murray, Maria Saraceno and Donna Sweigart. Responses to their call for proposals came from around the Bay area and even Miami, drawing in one artist who, appropriately enough, plans to relocate here. The resulting designs, most of which were built in the park over the weekend, can be seen at [projecthomestpete.com](http://projecthomestpete.com).

Visions ranged from the fanciful to the functional. Several variations on an emergency shelter theme seemed determined to remind visitors that, in hurricane country, the line between housed and homeless is an unpredictable one. "Country Dweller" by Ginger MacConnell, Matt Friese, Erika Ellis and Ian

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Michael Conway, Tectao Studios

**HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU: Tom Murray and Donna Sweigart's "Paper White (Echo)," in mirror and sod at Williams Park**  
pictures: [1](#) | [2](#)

### info

#### Project: HOME

HOME BOUND Public Art Installation, March 30-31 at Williams Park. Post-Show at St. Petersburg College Downtown Center, April 21-May 19, Reception Sat., April 21, 4-7 p.m. Public forum with panel speakers (TBD) at 5:30 p.m. 244 Second Ave. N., St. Petersburg, [projecthomestpete.com](http://projecthomestpete.com).

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Humble, paired a mosquito-net tent and camouflage cover with a matching hammock that folded up into a rucksack for an instant campsite. Other, more playful submissions sought to show, perhaps, that a tiny or temporary home need not sacrifice fabulousness: the colorful "Tiki Hut Mobile Shelter" proposed by Judith Salmon of Gulfport and a "House of Glitter" (a minimalist red frame decked out in sparkly streamers of the same color) by Cecilia Lueza of Miami.

Nogami's own design, a series of cheerful red mailboxes bearing tiny Mt. Fuji landscapes chained to trees around the park, imagined "home" as wherever the mail arrives. Sweigart and Murray, surprising passersby with a mirror nestled in sod on the park grass, suggested the body as the ultimate home -- perhaps also hinting at the danger, à la Narcissus, of clinging too fervently to a vessel we're only meant to occupy briefly.

Whether the project succeeded as an outreach to either the homeless or the city's more affluent residents, I can't say. During the hour (more or less) I spent in the park on Saturday evening, visitors who were neither homeless nor artists taking part in the project seemed few and far between. One man washed his hair in the park's fountain, an impromptu performance that spoke volumes about his own reasons for choosing Williams Park as a habitat.

If you missed the weekend's display or saw it and want to know more, check out photographs of the installation later this month at St. Petersburg College's Downtown Center. At that time, a public forum and panel of speakers will invite people to share their views.

**If you thought** the Fluff Constructivists (aka the Fluff Construct) were going out quietly, you've got another thing coming. *The Bats Will Cum: Antecedents* is the title of the collaborative duo's latest, aggressively strange body of work that marries whimsy with high concepts, hot-button content and the occasional bit of gore -- and it's likely to be the last the two University of South Florida MFA grads create for Bay area audiences.

Mikel Bisbee-Durlam and Ethan Kruszka -- joined for this show by Shawn Cheatham, working under the moniker Q&A Productions -- began collaborating in Cedar Falls, Iowa, in 1999. They split when Durlam went to graduate school in New York State and Kruszka arrived at USF (after a stint at Florida State), but when Durlam reconsidered his northern choice, Kruszka convinced him to give Tampa a shot. Since then, the Fluffs have been active contributors to the edgy end of the Bay area contemporary art spectrum, exhibiting at Covivant, USF's Contemporary Art Museum, Flight 19 and Silver Meteor Gallery, and staging public art at a local mall, strip club, high school and skate park. Next month, when Durlam heads to Vermont and Kruszka returns to the Midwest, the collaboration will continue, just not in Tampa. (Bid adieu to their wives as well: painter Megan Bisbee-Durlam and Nicki Kruszka, a program assistant at Graphicstudio.)

The show at Para Gallery, a rough-around-the-edges space that provides a nice foil for the works, takes a conceptual swipe at the B-grade horror film. A series of fake movie posters drums up an impressive suggestion of authenticity through artfully fake titles, fonts, creepy digital photography and found images. Three videos, trailers for fake films, play in a loop on a handmade projection box made by the Constructivists, and a sculptural installation brings together elements of their trademark sculpture -- faux-taxidermy cats, a giant dead cow (being feasted on by, yes, bats), oil

#### The Bats Will Cum: Antecedents

The Fluff Construct in collaboration with Q&A Productions. Runs through April 15, Closing reception Fri., April 13, 7-11 p.m. Para Gallery, 2929 N. 15th St., Tampa, [paragallery.com](http://paragallery.com).

barrels and two small figures afloat in an orange life raft.

The videos find the Constructivists at their most subversive, swapping the relatively shallow, mental-junk-food context of the fright flick for content that ranges from baffling to purposely offensive. One disjointed narrative shows two women in swimsuits giggling and squirting each other with spray bottles, intercut with shots of a man (who is black) peeing in his underwear; another depicts a man executing a small burqa-wrapped figure in effigy. (The dead figure, as a sculpture, is part of the installation.)

As enticing as I find the idea of confronting the viewer with charged images -- of waking us up from the sleep of entertainment with a glimpse of the politically incorrect -- I have to wonder how a project like this transcends the weirdly horrible imagery it presents. (When we spoke, Durlam himself seemed to have mixed feelings about watching a mother and daughter view the video with discomfort.) I will say this: it is one hell of a note to leave town on.

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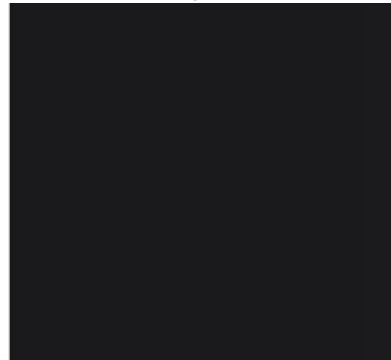
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